JUNE 2018

FROM SOLDIER TO CIVILIAN

PROFESSIONALIZING THE TRANSITION

SENATE | SÉNAT CANADA

Report of the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs

The Honourable Jean-Guy Dagenais, Chair
The Honourable Mobina S.B. Jaffer, Deputy Chair

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THE COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Honourable Jean-Guy Dagenais, *Chair*
The Honourable Mobina S.B. Jaffer, *Deputy Chair*

The Honourable Senators

Gwen Bonifave
Paul E. McIntyre
David Richards

Other Senators who have participated in the study:

The Honourable Daniel Lang, Ghislain Martin, Fabian Manning, Raymonde Saint-Germain, Pamela Wallin and Vernon White.

Parliamentary Information and Research Services, Library of Parliament:

Havi Echenberg, Analyst
Isabelle Lafontaine-Émond, Analyst

Clerk of the Committee:

Adam Thompson

Senate Committees Directorate:

Diane McMartin

ORDER OF REFERENCE

Extract from the *Journals of the Senate,* Tuesday, March 7, 2017:

The Honourable Senator Boniface moved, for the Honourable Senator Jaffer, seconded by the Honourable Senator Pate:

That the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence be authorized to examine and report on issues relating to creating a defined, professional and consistent system for veterans as they leave the Canadian Armed Forces; and

That the committee table its report no later than June 30, 2017, and that the committee retain all powers necessary to publicize its findings for 180 days after the tabling of the final report.

After debate,

The question being put on the motion, it was adopted.

Charles Robert
Clerk of the Senate

Delegation to the subcommittee

Extract from the Minutes of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence of Monday, March 6, 2017.

It was agreed that:

If the Senate adopts the order of reference regarding issues relating to creating a defined, professional and consistent system for veterans as they leave the Canadian Armed Forces, this order of reference be delegated to the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs.

Adam Thompson
Clerk of the Committee

Extract from the *Journals of the Senate*, Wednesday, March 29, 2018:

The Honourable Senator Dagenais moved, seconded by the Honourable Senator Poirier:

That, notwithstanding the orders of the Senate adopted on Tuesday, March 7, 2017, Tuesday, June 20, 2017 and Thursday, October 26, 2017, the date for the final report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence in relation to its study of issues related to creating a defined, professional and consistent system for veterans as they leave the Canadian Armed Forces be extended from March 31, 2018 to June 30, 2018.

The question being put on the motion, it was adopted.

Richard Denis
Clerk of the Senate

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The CAF recruitment system is said to be professional, structured, personalized and consistent across the country. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the system for transitioning from military to civilian life. There are too many obstacles in the way for too many CAF members and veterans, causing them real distress. We need to create a transition system that mirrors the CAF recruitment system. To assist in developing such a system, the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence has undertaken a study on how to professionalize the transition from military to civilian life. The witnesses who appeared as part of this study suggested several promising solutions and raised important issues.

Seven key aspects needing improvement came out of what was heard from the witnesses:

- providing services and benefits to members and veterans in a timely manner;
- making the transition process more navigable for members leaving military life;
- facilitating access to benefits and services from Veterans Affairs Canada, sometimes years after the release;
- streamlining Veterans Affairs Canada's medical determination process;
- easing access to mental health supports for members and veterans;
- providing members and veterans with the necessary supports so they can determine their new purpose in life and successfully achieve it; and
- improving collaboration between Veterans Affairs Canada and other levels of government and agencies in order to improve services to veterans.

In keeping with these seven major themes, the Subcommittee has made 13 recommendations for the Government of Canada to facilitate the transition to civilian life for the men and women who have served our country. Among them, the Subcommittee believes it is highly important that the government move forward without delay on three practical solutions:

→ **That the Canadian Armed Forces ensure that no member is released from the Canadian Forces until all benefits and services from all sources, including the Canadian Forces pension and Veterans Affairs benefits and services, are in place;**

→ **That Veterans Affairs Canada ensure that a maximum ratio of 25 veterans per case manager is maintained; and**

→ **That the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Canada collaborate to issue an identification card to members prior to release that includes a recognition of military service, and a VAC identification number to allow either the veteran or VAC to follow up.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

That the Canadian Armed Forces ensure that no member is released from the Canadian Forces until all benefits and services from all sources, including the Canadian Forces pension and Veterans Affairs benefits and services, are in place.

Recommendation 2

That Veterans Affairs Canada make every effort to simplify the administrative complexity inherent in the delivery of its programs and address the confusion created by having several programs with similar objectives.

Recommendation 3

That Veterans Affairs Canada ensure that a maximum ratio of 25 veterans per case manager is maintained by regularly monitoring workloads and staffing levels of front-line staff.

Recommendation 4

That the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada create "release centres," where decisions can be made with respect to transition supports and where releasing members have greater access to supports and services from Veterans Affairs Canada. The Subcommittee also recommends that consideration be given to co-locating these centres on military bases and/or with recruitment centres, with staff from the new Canadian Armed Forces Transition Group.

Recommendation 5

That the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Canada collaborate to ensure that before a member is released, the individual has a complete file ready, which includes their service record and history of medical treatment and which will be easy to access by VAC should the veteran need to access the department's services at a later time.

Recommendation 6

That a navigator service be put in place, both within the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of Veterans Affairs, and be staffed with current and/or retired CAF members, to guide and support military personnel through the release process, and afterward, if they need to access VAC services later in time.

Recommendation 7

That one easy, navigable, common Web portal be created containing all relevant information on the benefits and services from Veterans Affairs and the Canadian Armed Forces.

Recommendation 8

That the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Canada collaborate to issue an identification card to members prior to release that includes a recognition of military service, and a VAC identification number to allow either the veteran or VAC to follow up.

Recommendation 9

That the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Canada collaborate to streamline their medical approval processes to ensure that veterans are not required to undergo duplicate medical determinations or tests.

Recommendation 10

That the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Canada immediately determine and establish competitive compensation rates for mental health professionals to support CAF members and veterans.

Recommendation 11

That the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Canada collaborate to ensure that all releasing members and veterans can access career counselling in order to determine a new objective in life and the means to achieve it.

Recommendation 12

That the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada seek more formal arrangements, through contracts or memoranda of understanding, to give veterans priority in accessing health, education and social services provided by provincial and territorial governments.

Recommendation 13

That the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Canada develop linkages with local police services to support police in their encounters with veterans and serving members, and to ensure that veterans and serving members who interact with police are referred to appropriate VAC services.

CONTEXT

In Canada, there are close to 700,000 veterans and more than 100,000 serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), not counting their family members. Each year, 9,000 to 10,000 CAF members are released; approximately 1,600 of them for medical reasons.[1] A third of the people who leave the military have difficulty making the transition to civilian life.[2]

Difficulties surrounding the transition from military to civilian life have been a recurring theme before the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs (the Subcommittee) and its counterpart in the House of Commons,[3] in reports by the Auditor General,[4] in Reports on Plans and Priorities for both the Department of National Defence (DND)[5] and Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC),[6] and in media coverage.[7]

The complex transition process causes significant frustration as well as more serious problems for a number of members leaving the CAF. Gary Walbourne, National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman, shared some of the struggles of releasing members of the Canadian Armed Forces:

> They are stories of financial hardship, emotional stress and senseless frustration. We have members of the Canadian Armed Forces who have served this country for decades, with multiple deployments and citations under their belts, and who face the threat of eviction or are evicted from their homes and face financial ruin while awaiting their severance pay, first pension cheque or benefits adjudication.[8]

In 2017, the Subcommittee first met with officials from VAC, who provided an overview of the work of the department, and then held five meetings during its study on creating a defined, professional and consistent system for veterans when they release from the CAF. During these meetings, it heard testimony from the National Defence/CAF Ombudsman, the Veterans Ombudsman, the Chief of the Defence Staff, representatives of

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[1] Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence (VEAC), *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 29 March 2017 (Guy Parent, Ombudsman, Office of the Veterans Ombudsman).

[2] VEAC, *Evidence*, 21 March 2018 (Hon. Seamus O'Regan, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence) and Veterans Affairs Canada, Life After Service Survey 2016.

[3] See, for example, VEAC, *The Transition to Civilian Life of Veterans*, 4 June 2014, and House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, *Continuum of Transition Services*, June 2015.

[4] Auditor General of Canada, "Transition of Ill and Injured Military Personnel to Civilian Life," Chapter 4, *2012 Fall Report of the Auditor General of Canada,* October 2012.

[5] See, for example, Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, "Minister's Message," *2017-18 Departmental Plan*, 2017, p. 2.

[6] Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC), *2015-16 Departmental Performance Report,"* 2016, p. 5.

[7] Recent examples include "Forces members need champion," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, 13 April 2017 and Annie Mathieu, "Les demandes d'aide bondissent chez les vétérans," *Le Soleil*, 5 April 2017.

[8] VEAC, *Evidence*, 8 March 2017 (Gary Walbourne, Ombudsman, Office of the Ombudsman for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces).

three veterans' organizations, and the then Minister and Deputy Minister of Veterans Affairs.[9] In March 2018, the current Veterans Affairs Minister, the Hon. Seamus O'Regan, and the Deputy Minister appeared before the Subcommittee and provided relevant details for the study.

The witnesses who appeared as part of the study acknowledged that some progress had been made in certain problematic areas of the transition process, and were in general agreement about the continuing challenges and the possible solutions to overcome them.

Subcommittee members also learned about certain realities during the hearings; for example, many CAF members find that, rather than a return to civilian life, transition from the forces marks the start of it. The Veterans Ombudsman quoted one person who had participated in a study conducted by his office:

> I joined the army at age 19. Before that I was in high school. I was never really a civilian adult. I don't feel that I am transitioning back to civilian life, but becoming a civilian for the first time.[10]

This report draws on testimony concerning the existing transition process to civilian life, and recent and current initiatives, and makes recommendations to address remaining obstacles to the seamless transition between soldier and civilian.

The Subcommittee believes this is vitally important, first and foremost for the members and their families who are making the transition, but also for national security. More than one witnesses stated that

> a successful transition is also a matter of national security: no one is going to walk in to a recruitment office or want to serve in the armed forces if they realize that they are not going to be treated well if they become injured while serving.[11]

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[9] The Hon. Kent Hehr was replaced by the Hon. Seamus O'Regan as Minister of Veterans Affairs on August 28, 2017.

[10] VEAC, *Evidence*, 29 March 2017, (Parent).

[11] Ibid. (Similar comments were made by Gen. Jonathan Vance, Chief of the Defence Staff, VEAC, *Evidence*, 12 April 2017).

OBSTACLES TO TRANSITION: AN OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE A NEW SYSTEM

Witnesses identified the following areas for improvement in the transition process: providing benefits in a timely manner; making the transition process more navigable for members; facilitating access to VAC benefits and services, including years after the transition; improving the medical determination processes; increasing access to mental health supports; helping members identify a new purpose in life and the means to achieve it; and enhancing collaboration with other levels of government and agencies.

While individuals who leave the CAF voluntarily sometimes encounter challenges during the transition to civilian life, those challenges are all the more difficult for individuals who are being medically released. One representative of a veterans' organization described the stark reality facing "seriously disabled solders, airmen, sailors and their spouses" during their transition "through the labyrinth of complexities between the Department of National Defence, Veterans Affairs Canada, the military umbrella and, as a newly disabled Canadian, a civilian life never envisioned."[12]

In spring 2017, the then-Minister of Veterans Affairs recognized the need to rethink the entire system:

> [W]e know we need to change the current system to create an easy-to-access, simple-to-navigate, veteran-centric process. We need to do something transformative, to do more than just slap on another piece of policy tape each time the system springs a leak. It's time to rebuild.[13]

The announcement of the new Pension for Life by the current Minister in December 2017 was presented as an attempt to reduce the complexity of support programs available to veterans and their families.[14] The new Pension for Life is a restructuring of the primary financial benefits delivered under the New Veterans Charter.[15] The proposed changes are presented in Part 4 of Bill C-74, *Budget Implementation Act, 2018, No. 1,*[16] and are to take effect on 1 April 2019. Basically, the current disability award (a lump-sum payment to a member or veteran suffering from a service-related disability) would be replaced by the Pain and Suffering Compensation, which would offer a choice between a monthly payment for life and the current lump-sum payment.[17] Also, four current

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[12] VEAC, *Evidence*, 3 May 2017 (Michael L. Blais, President and Founder, Canadian Veterans Advocacy)
[13] VEAC, *Evidence*, 10 May 2017 (Hehr).
[14] VAC, Government of Canada announces a Pension for Life for Veterans, 20 December 2017.
[15] *Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act*.
[16] Bill C-74, *Budget Implementation Act, 2018, No. 1,* was introduced in the House of Commons on 27 March 2018 and is currently at second reading.
[17] VAC, Pain and Suffering Compensation, *Factsheet*.

benefits would be replaced by the new Income Replacement Benefit[18] and the new Additional Pain and Suffering Compensation,[19] which are different in some respects from the current benefits.[20]

More broadly, during their spring 2017 appearance, the Veterans Ombudsman and the CAF Chief of the Defence Staff explained the need to create a transition system that mirrors the CAF recruitment system: professional, structured, personalized and consistent across the country.[21] According to the Ombudsman, this new system would apply to all releasing CAF members and would include release centres across the country; a single Web portal for the services and benefits of both departments, under one authority; benefits in place immediately upon release; a navigator to guide and support members during the process; a counsellor to help them set new career goals; and the introduction of a veterans identification card to facilitate follow-up. Some of these proposals will be explored in greater detail later in this report.

A. Providing benefits in a timely manner

One issue that was identified as a significant concern by witnesses before the Subcommittee is the hardship that can result from releasing members from the Canadian Armed Forces before their pension and all their benefits, if applicable, are in place.

The President of Canadian Veterans Advocacy (CVA) described some of these hurdles and their impacts:

> One of the greatest obstacles, both in transition and post-release, was complexities, paperwork and extended periods between determination of eligibility, status and the provision of a subsequent sacrifice award or, as promised in the future, commencement of the monthly life pension. This invariably results in grave financial discord and withheld desperately required funds that would have assisted with transition due to an unforecasted medical release bereft of sufficient time to prepare by saving and a forced relocation to somewhere far from the military community or the services that supported them through transition. [22]

He also mentioned the elevated risk of suicide for mentally wounded veterans, particularly within the first two years after release, underscoring the importance of these veterans having all the supports they need in place:

> I was shocked to find out that out of the 70-plus [veterans] suicides identified through [a media investigation], over half committed suicide within two years of release, many within six or seven months. I think that's indicative of the fact that we did not have that mental health umbrella or the social infrastructure umbrella in place before

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[18] VAC, Income Replacement Benefit, *Factsheet*.
[19] VAC, Additional Pain and Suffering Compensation, *Factsheet*.
[20] For more information about the proposed changes, see the Legislative Summary of Bill C-74, Budget Implementation Act, 2018, No. 1, Part 4.
[21] VEAC, *Evidence*, 12 April 2017 (Gen. Jonathan Vance, Chief of the Defence Staff, National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces), and VEAC, *Evidence*, 29 March 2017, (Parent).
[22] VEAC, *Evidence*, 3 May 2017, (Blais).

> we let them go. That is why it's so important to have a comprehensive transitionary process [...][23]

The Chief of the Defence Staff also addressed the importance of releasing members receiving their pension and benefits in a timely manner:

> I want my members to retire knowing that their pension cheque will be coming, that their care will be in place and that everything else they need will be taken care of. Whether or not they are healthy when they retire and whether or not they experience a service-related injury after retirement, it doesn't matter. [...] When I hear stories from my people about how they have gone for weeks or even months without the pension they've earned through their service, [...] disappointed doesn't even come close to describing how I feel.[24]

1. Current initiatives and planned or proposed changes

About the issue of delays in receiving the military pension in particular, the Chief of the Defence Staff explained that the CAF pension program is now administered by Public Services and Procurement Canada and now provides 96 per cent of applicants with their first payment within 30 days, "provided all of the paperwork is done properly." He noted that this was an improvement but that the CAF was still working at making the process less complex.[25]

The National Defence and CAF Ombudsman commended that change in administrators:

> The transfer of pensions from the department over to Public Services and Procurement Canada is going to stand us very well. I think that was a smart move on behalf of the department. PSPC are professionals and this is what they do.[26]

The National Defence and CAF Ombudsman, the Veterans Ombudsman, the CVA, the Canadian Aboriginal Veterans, and the Royal Canadian Legion all asked that no member be released from the military before their pension and all their benefits are in place.

> [N]obody should be released from the forces until all benefits are in place. In Holland they don't release anyone until people have actually found a job. We have a long way to go yet ... all benefits should be in place because financial stability is very important, especially if you are going through vocational rehabilitation.[27]

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[23] Ibid.
[24] VEAC, *Evidence*, 12 April 2017, (Vance).
[25] Ibid.
[26] VEAC, *Evidence*, 8 March 2017 (Walbourne).
[27] VEAC, *Evidence*, 29 March 2017, (Parent).

Canada's new defence policy, *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, introduced in June 2017, contains a new initiative to ensure that all benefits are in place before serving members make the transition to civilian life:[28]

> A new Canadian Armed Forces Transition Group, commanded by a General Officer, will be established. All military personnel will use the services of this group, where the professional staff will ensure that all pre-release and pension administration is completed, and benefits are in place, before the transition to post-military life.[29]

2. Subcommittee observations and recommendation

The Subcommittee was struck by the significant problems that delayed access to benefits and pension caused for some released members and therefore recommends as follows:

Recommendation 1

> **That the Canadian Armed Forces ensure that no member is released from the Canadian Forces until all benefits and services from all sources, including the Canadian Forces pension and Veterans Affairs benefits and services, are in place.**

B. Making the transition process more navigable for members

There was general agreement amongst witnesses that serving members of the CAF, including those who are awaiting release from the Forces, would benefit from more information about VAC services, including training programs, and from access to support from the department. The Veterans Ombudsman suggested that DND needs "to think of retirement when they think of recruitment. It should be part of the recruiting process. One of these days that career will end," suggesting that VAC could be providing information at the outset of a military career.[30] During his appearance in March 2018, the Minister of Veterans Affairs agreed, telling the Subcommittee that he wanted the transition process to begin at the start of a military career, for example by providing members with information through the My VAC Account portal.[31]

Witnesses described the release process for those who choose to leave the military and for those who are medically released as complex and flawed. As described by the Veterans Ombudsman,

> There are multiple players from separate organizations. In fact, at least 15 are involved in the transition process. Each has its own accountability framework, mandate and processes. The result is a duplication of effort, gaps and inconsistencies across groups and geographic locations.[32]

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[28] Department of National Defence, 2017, *Strong, Secure, Engaged, Canada's Defence Policy*, p. 31.
[29] Ibid., p. 30.
[30] VEAC, *Evidence*, 29 March 2017, (Parent).
[31] VEAC, *Evidence*, 21 March 2018 (O'Regan).
[32] VEAC, *Evidence*, 29 March 2017, (Parent).

He also noted the confusion created by duplicate programs, some of which share the same objectives, as in the case of vocational rehabilitation:

> There are presently three different vocational rehabilitation programs. One is with the Canadian Armed Forces. ... The second one is provided by the insurance system, which actually has a vocational rehabilitation program. The third one is Veterans Affairs Canada. ... [W]hat needs to be done ... is to have one program for all based on best practices with a measurable outcome so that we know whether or not people are successful.[33]

The Veterans Ombudsman emphasized the need for collaboration to improve the transition process: "The [current] system is characterized by multiple stop shopping because an integrated process with a single point of contact for all releasing regular and reserve force members has not been established by National Defence, the Canadian Armed Forces or Veterans Affairs Canada."[34]

This goal has been formally identified in the mandate letter from the Prime Minister to the Minister of Veterans Affairs which includes as a "top priority" to work with the Minister of National Defence to "reduce complexity, and strengthen partnerships between Veterans Affairs and National Defence."[35]

Minister O'Regan said that his department was in constant contact with the Department of National Defence to get records moving so that in future, veterans will not feel or know that they are moving from one bureaucracy to another.[36]

1. Current initiatives and planned or proposed changes

a. *Dismantling the Joint Personnel Support Unit and creating a new Transition Group*

According to the Veterans Ombudsman, the Integrated Personnel Support Centres (IPSCs), which are part of the Joint Personnel Support Unit (JPSU),[37] are doing great work for members with complex medical cases, but for members who are slightly injured, "communications are poor, processes are difficult, and we have some challenges there."[38] In his opinion, "we need to start from scratch to have a process for people who are healthy and a process for people who are slightly injured."[39]

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[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence Mandate Letter (October 4, 2017).
[36] VEAC, *Evidence*, 21 March 2018 (O'Regan).
[37] The JPSU and its IPSCs provide access to benefits, programs and family services available to injured and ill CAF members and their families while they go through the process of reintegrating duty or planning their transition from the military.
[38] VEAC, *Evidence*, 29 March 2017, (Parent).
[39] Ibid.

The Chief of the Defence Staff said that as a first step, he appointed a general officer responsible for the Joint Personnel Support Unit, as part of efforts to reinforce the Unit. However, he stated his intention to recommend the disbandment of the JPSU in the future and the "establishment of a new organization that has the resources and the policy base and flexibility to adequately deal on a personal, individualized level across the Armed Forces."[40]

He described this decision as a change in the CAF's "approach from that which is provided by the current JPSU [to] staff an organization that will exist across the country and provide expertise and direct support to those members who are retiring, regardless of the reason for their retirement."[41]

As mentioned earlier, Canada's new defence policy, *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, released 7 June 2017, includes a new initiative to create the CAF Transition Group, which will provide "support to all members to seamlessly transition to post-military life."[42]

This Group, commanded by a General Officer and staffed from experts in human resources and personnel administration, will be approximately 1,200 personnel strong and include specialized staff and holding positions for ill and injured who are preparing to return to duty or transition out of the Canadian Armed Forces. The Group will provide a fully engaged, personalized, guided support to transition all Canadian Armed Forces members, with special care and attention being provided to those who are ill or injured, including those with psychological or critical stress injuries.[43]

b. *Results of the VAC 2016 Service Delivery Review and Cultural Change within the Department*

During his appearance before the Subcommittee, then-Minister of Veterans Affairs Hehr discussed the results of a Service Delivery Review completed in 2016 and the steps taken to address the problems it had uncovered:

> [W]e now have a plan to deliver services that are faster, more agile and more responsive, placing greater emphasis on veterans when they first contact the department, providing a personalized response that addresses all of a veteran's needs and ensuring there is no wrong door when a veteran reaches out.[44]

General (Ret'd) W. J. Natynczyk, Deputy Minister of VAC (the "Deputy Minister") described a cultural change already underway within VAC that is reflected in the department's responses to veterans seeking services or supports:

> The strategy that the minister has authorized in the department is one of care, compassion and respect which will operationalize what the Pension Act says, namely

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[40] VEAC, *Evidence*, 12 April 2017, (Vance).
[41] Ibid.
[42] Department of National Defence, p. 31.
[43] Ibid.
[44] VEAC, *Evidence*, 10 May 2017, (Hehr).

> that we should give veterans the benefit of the doubt. This is across the department. Our mission is to provide care. If we have to default in decision-making, we default to compassion, always showing the veteran and their family respect.[45]

During his appearance in March 2018, Minister O'Regan said that right after he was sworn in, he stressed to VAC employees the importance of giving the benefit of the doubt to the person who calls the department.[46]

c. *Recent initiatives at Veterans Affairs Canada*

The Veterans Ombudsman informed the Subcommittee of a pilot project in some VAC area offices that in 2016–2017 identified "navigators" to help veterans applying for benefits "to know what the next step is and how to accomplish and access certain benefits."[47] According to VAC, once the department has feedback on this pilot project and two other pilots on case management disengagement and the National Contact Centre Network Reach Out initiative (responding to new applicants faster), its new guided support approach is expected to roll out across the country in 2017-2018.[48]

The then-Minister of Veterans Affairs described a consolidation of financial benefits and programming underway in the department, to reduce the hundreds of possible responses a VAC employee currently needs to choose from in order to properly assist each person, while keeping enough options available to be able to meet the different needs of the diverse veterans.[49]

The former Minister also explained that with the addition of 400 new hires, VAC is working towards a ratio of 25 veterans per case manager, compared to a caseload of 35 or more veterans per case manager, which had been the ratio until fairly recently.[50] During his appearance in March 2018, the current Minister said that while the 25:1 ratio was still the stated goal, increased demand on the department, which he attributes to service improvements, has made it currently impossible to achieve this goal. The Minister and Deputy Minister said that new employees continue to be recruited and trained and that clients are being nudged to make greater use of the My VAC Account portal when appropriate.[51]

During his appearance before the Subcommittee, the president of CVA indicated that the most significant measure to improve transition complexities is to hire and train the promised new VAC front-line staff:

> [...]without adequate numbers of staff at Veterans Affairs Canada to proficiently process claims in an expedient manner and to provide Veterans Affairs Canada-related

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[45] VEAC, *Evidence*, 10 May 2017 (General Ret'd W.J. Natynczyk, Deputy Minister, Veterans Affairs Canada).
[46] VEAC, *Evidence*, 21 March 2018 (O'Regan).
[47] VEAC, *Evidence*, 29 March 2017, (Parent).
[48] VAC, Delivering Service Excellence, 2017.
[49] VEAC, *Evidence*, 10 May 2017, (Hehr).
[50] Ibid.
[51] VEAC, *Evidence*, 21 March 2018 (Hon. Seamus O'Regan, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Veterans Affairs Canada, and General (Ret'd) W. J. Natynczyk, Deputy Minister).

services while transitioning and beyond, the delays and frustrations will prevail unabated[52].

2. Subcommittee observations and recommendations

The administrative hurdles that still face CAF members and veterans, particularly as they transition from one department to the other, were raised in the course of this study. VAC staff noted the complexity of multiple benefits programs and on-going efforts to simplify their administration.[53]

The Veterans Ombudsman cited the results of a recent qualitative survey undertaken by his office, in which participants identified "broken lines of communication between different offices handling their files [and] poor, incorrect or incomplete information provided to them" as examples.[54]

While the Subcommittee recognizes the need for a wide range of service options to meet the varying needs of veterans, it recommends as follows:

Recommendation 2

That Veterans Affairs Canada make every effort to simplify the administrative complexity inherent in the delivery of its programs and address the confusion created by having several programs with similar objectives.

In light of the testimony received regarding the importance of having all the people in place to ensure efficiency and timeliness in delivering services to veterans, the Subcommittee recommends the following:

Recommendation 3

That Veterans Affairs Canada ensure that a maximum ratio of 25 veterans per case manager is maintained by regularly monitoring workloads and staffing levels of front-line staff.

Considering that a number of witnesses[55] said they supported the introduction of transition centres across the country for all serving members who are preparing to leave the armed forces, the Subcommittee recommends:

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[52] VEAC, *Evidence*, 3 May 2017, (Blais).
[53] VEAC, *Evidence*, 1 March 2017 (Kim Andrews, Acting Director General, Service Delivery and Program Management, Veterans Affairs Canada).
[54] VEAC, *Evidence*, 29 March 2017, (Parent).
[55] In particular, the Veterans Ombudsman (VEAC, Evidence, 29 March 2017, Parent), the Canadian Aboriginal Veterans and Serving Members Association (VEAC, *Evidence*, 3 May 2017, Richard Blackwolf) and the Royal Canadian Legion (VEAC, *Evidence*, 3 May 2017, Ray McInnis).

Recommendation 4

> **That the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada create "release centres," where decisions can be made with respect to transition supports and where releasing members have greater access to supports and services from Veterans Affairs Canada. The Subcommittee also recommends that consideration be given to co-locating these centres on military bases and/or with recruitment centres, with staff from the new Canadian Armed Forces Transition Group.**

C. Facilitating access to VAC benefits and services, sometimes years after the release

1. Current initiatives and planned or proposed changes

The VAC Deputy Minister explained that veterans come to the Department of Veterans Affairs to access services and benefits at different points in their life; with half of them doing so more than two years after release from the CAF.

> Of our total clientele, 25 per cent [...] come to us while they're still wearing a Canadian Armed Forces uniform. [...] 25 per cent of them come to us within two years of release. [...] Fifty per cent of our clientele come from year two to year 50. We have World War II veterans who are walking in for the first time. In those cases, we are doing all of the confirmation of eligibility, looking through their old service records and medical records and trying to adjudicate them.[56]

The Chief of the Defense Staff stated that this reality is being taken into consideration in the third component of the new CAF Personnel Management initiative called The Journey[57] – making the transition seamless between the CAF and VAC:

> ...a full 75 per cent of Veterans Affairs Canada's caseload, or close to that, are those people whose injuries or needs manifest after they've left the Armed Forces. So we want to make sure that the transition, and the process around transition, also supports those who need to come back to VAC or to us to ensure that, if they need additional support after they've left the Armed Forces, they get it.[58]

General Vance stated that there would be policies and a guided veteran-centric approach to "eliminate the mystery around the paperwork and the challenges that our veterans have described, and do that in a way that is as complete as possible before they take the uniform off."[59] He added that if veterans are "effectively transitioned with a veteran-centric approach, where the Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs are collaborating all the way through and at that point of taking that uniform off", "there will be a transition file and it will be easy for Veterans

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[56] VEAC, *Evidence*, 10 May 2017 (Natynczyk).
[57] "The Journey" is explained in greater detail on page 18 of this report.
[58] VEAC, *Evidence*, 12 April 2017, (Vance).
[59] Ibid.

Affairs to acquaint themselves" with individuals who retire healthy but need to access VAC benefits later on.[60] He said:

> We [...] have to make certain that those who have retired healthy and who need to come back into the system because of a latent, unknown or newly manifesting condition are recognized. Their service record is there and any medical treatment they've received before is there. They're not an unknown entity.[61]

2. Subcommittee observations and recommendations

The Subcommittee recognizes the importance of facilitating the process for veterans who need to access services and benefits from VAC at any point, sometimes years after their release and therefore recommends:

Recommendation 5

> **That the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Canada collaborate to ensure that before a member is released, the individual has a complete file ready, which includes their service record and history of medical treatment and which will be easy to access by VAC should the veteran need to access the department's services at a later time.**

The Veterans Ombudsman recommended that a navigator service should be in place, available during the transition process and after, to help "fill out forms and submit a single application for benefits, ... plan the member's release and set up required appointments, provide advice in relation to possible third party organizations that may offer support, and follow up after release at predetermined intervals to ensure evolving needs are met."[62] The National Defence and CAF Ombudsman made a similar recommendation, calling it a "concierge service."[63]

The Subcommittee believes that such a navigator service would help releasing members and veterans access benefits and services from the CAF and VAC more easily, both during the transition period and subsequently, and therefore recommends the following:

Recommendation 6

> **That a navigator service be put in place, both within the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of Veterans Affairs, and be staffed with current and/or retired CAF members, to guide and support military personnel through the release process, and afterward, if they need to access VAC services later in time.**

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[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] VEAC, *Evidence*, 29 March 2017, (Parent).
[63] VEAC, *Evidence*, 8 March 2017 (Walbourne).

Also in order to facilitate access to services and benefits needed by members in uniform and veterans, both the National Defence and CAF Ombudsman and the Veterans Ombudsman recommended that a single common user-friendly online portal be created, containing all relevant information on the benefits and services from VAC and the CAF.[64] The Subcommittee considers that having all the information in one place would help CAF members and veterans to be aware of the supports available to them and therefore recommends as follows:

Recommendation 7

That one easy, navigable, common Web portal be created containing all relevant information on the benefits and services from Veterans Affairs and the Canadian Armed Forces.

Several witnesses pointed to the importance of being issued an identification (ID) card as part of the recruitment and integration process as members join the CAF, calling for the issuance of an ID card as part of the release process as well. They testified that providing an ID card to releasing members and veterans could support veterans in transitioning to new purpose.

As described by the Veterans Ombudsman, this card issued to recruits serves as "your identity" for enrolled members of the CAF. The provision of such a card, even prior to release, for veterans, could serve multiple purposes: to recognize service and allow VAC to "proactively follow up with them after release,"[65] "to give them a new identity that they will not lose when they leave the Canadian Armed Forces,"[66] and to be encoded with information that "can be swiped at any Veterans Affairs Canada office or Service Canada office to access services."[67]

Similarly, a representative of the Royal Canadian Legion proposed a Veterans' ID card "for every releasing member and veteran in Canada that not only recognizes their service but also enables Veterans Affairs Canada to proactively follow up with them after release."[68] He highlighted the introduction of new benefits in Budget 2017 makes this especially important for all veterans, not only those who are medically released.

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[64] Ibid, VEAC, March 2017, Parent and Walbourne.
[65] VEAC, *Evidence*, 29 March 2017, (Parent); a similar purpose was described by VEAC, *Evidence*, 3 May 2017 (Ray McInnis, Director, Service Bureau, Royal Canadian Legion).
[66] Ibid.
[67] VEAC, *Evidence*, 3 May 2017, (Blackwolf).
[68] VEAC, *Evidence*, 3 May 2017, (McInnis).

After hearing from these witnesses, the Subcommittee is convinced that issuing a veterans' ID card would be beneficial for various reasons, such as fostering a sense of identity and of belonging to a community, recognizing the veterans' service, and facilitating access to VAC services after their release. Therefore, the Subcommittee recommends the following:

Recommendation 8

> **That the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Canada collaborate to issue an identification card to members prior to release that includes a recognition of military service, and a VAC identification number to allow either the veteran or VAC to follow up.**

D. Streamlining the medical determination process

Witnesses identified a number of obstacles in the way of a professional release and smooth transition, many centred on the differences in governance and roles of the CAF and VAC. The Veterans Ombudsman explained the process when a veteran applies to VAC for benefits:

> The first thing that happens is that there has to be the proof of service and a diagnosed illness or injury that is attributable to that period of service. There are two different steps there. After that there is an evaluation of how much the injury or illness affects the individual's life or ability to generate income.
>
> What is happening now is that the veterans do not submit the medical records themselves. Veterans Affairs Canada has to go to Archives Canada or to one of the military headquarters to get the medical files. Then they look at the file and the adjudicator looks at the diagnosis on the file and decides the attribution of service.[69]

1. Current initiatives and planned or proposed changes

a. *VAC presence at CAF medical board hearings*

The Chief of the Defence Staff noted that one recent change was the presence of VAC staff at medical board hearings by the CAF to ensure that it is "not a cold start to Veterans Affairs when a person leaves the Armed Forces under medical restrictions" and seeks benefits administered by VAC.[70]

b. *VAC simplified processes for certain types of injuries*

The Deputy Minister of VAC told the Subcommittee of a change that allows the attribution of injury or impairment to military service for some positions in the CAF, whether or not they are documented in an individual's medical record. As an example, he said, "[W]e have an infantryman, a paratrooper who has hundreds of parachute jumps

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[69] VEAC, *Evidence*, 29 March 2017, (Parent).
[70] VEAC, *Evidence*, 12 April 2017, (Vance).

but nothing on the medical file that says they have an injury to their ankles, knees or hips. Afterward, they have problems with all their joints. Under this model that person would be accepted." [71]

The same has been true for those who have experienced hearing loss over time; the CAF ombudsman identified improved efficiency within VAC in the process for applying for hearing loss benefits, describing that "type of innovation and new delivery model" as "encouraging."[72]

c. *Proposed expansion of CAF Surgeon General's mandate*

To further simplify the process for accessing needed supports, the CAF Ombudsman proposed that the Surgeon General's mandate be expanded to include the extent of attribution to service, suggesting it could reduce waiting time for processing by 50 per cent, while acknowledging that only one-quarter of those seeking VAC services and benefits do so while still in the CAF.[73] The Chief of the Defence Staff[74] and Veterans Ombudsman[75] told the Subcommittee that this solution did not meet the needs of the 75 per cent of VAC clients who seek services and benefits after leaving the CAF, and felt that the needs of the CAF and VAC are sufficiently distinct so as to require separate processes.

d. *Transferring medical files from CAF to VAC*

The two ombudsmen and the Chief of the Defence Staff all agreed that improving the transfer of medical files from the CAF to VAC, subject to privacy requirements, could assist in minimizing the complexity of the medical determination process.

Minister Hehr confirmed that VAC "should be doing much better" at transferring medical files from the CAF to VAC, and that progress is being made:

Canadian Armed Forces medical records are now digitized so we can easily share the information required to determine eligibility for VAC support. This has resulted in the routing of 56 per cent of claims through a streamlined decision-making model and we've also reduced the average transfer time of these service health records from CAF to VAC from 54 per cent, from 35 to 19 days. I think that's important.[76]

During their appearance in March 2018, the current Minister and Deputy Minister provided a few clarifications surrounding the problems with transferring health records from the CAF to VAC. The Deputy Minister explained that the problem lies with privacy and removing all third-party information from the records. He said that VAC seconded employees to the CAF to help remove this third-party information in order to make records transfers faster. However, he did say that in some cases there is no diagnosis in the CAF health records, because their main goal is to return the individual to service, not necessarily come up with a diagnosis. This is a problem for VAC with

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[71] VEAC, *Evidence*, 10 May 2017 (Natynczyk).
[72] VEAC, *Evidence*, 8 March 2017 (Walbourne).
[73] VEAC, *Evidence*, 8 March 2017 (Walbourne).
[74] VEAC, *Evidence*, 12 April 2017, (Vance).
[75] VEAC, *Evidence*, 29 March 2017, (Parent).
[76] VEAC, *Evidence*, 10 May 2017, (Hehr).

respect to decision-making. The Deputy Minister said that he was working closely with the Surgeon General of the CAF to resolve the issue.[77]

2. Subcommittee observations and recommendation

The Subcommittee recognizes that considerable effort and some progress has been made to ease the processes by which veterans can access needed medical supports; the Subcommittee also notes that this particular aspect of transition continues to serve as a hurdle over which veterans must climb to get those supports and services. To address this hurdle, the Subcommittee recommends:

Recommendation 9

That the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Canada collaborate to streamline their medical approval processes to ensure that veterans are not required to undergo duplicate medical determinations or tests.

E. Easing access to mental health supports

In their testimony, all witnesses pointed to the urgency of providing timely, adequate and appropriate mental health services to veterans who need them. In addition to recognizing that access to mental health services is challenging for many Canadians, particularly those in remote or isolated communities, there were questions and testimony related to the particular mental health challenges for releasing members of the CAF and veterans.

1. Current initiatives and planned or proposed changes

Noting that stigma associated with mental health challenges can delay or prevent CAF members and veterans from seeking assistance, access to diagnosis and/or appropriate supports may be urgent once a problem is identified. While the Chief of the Defence Staff, the then-Minister of Veterans Affairs and his Deputy Minister described current services as robust, other witnesses saw room for improvement.

a. *Access to mental health professionals*

According to the CVA President, "DND's inability to hire a sufficient number of mental health professionals such as psychiatrists, psychologists and counsellors to serve in isolated bases where most of our combat orientated units are congregated is the root problem."[78] He emphasized the need for CAF and VAC to meet with mental health professionals' organizations, make them aware of the urgent needs of military personnel and veterans, and "convince these mental health professionals to accept their sacred obligation."[79]

Minister Hehr described how VAC addresses this issue:

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[77] VEAC, *Evidence*, 21 March 2018 (General Natynczyk).
[78] VEAC, *Evidence*, 3 May 2017, (Blais).
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.

> [W]e deliver mental health supports for veterans and their families as a result of the unique role they have played in the Canadian Armed Forces and what they suffer with afterwards as a result. We work with 4,000 mental health professionals from coast-to-coast-to-coast who work with our veterans to provide them with those supports.[80]

General Natynczyk stated that in the case of armed forces veterans who have a diagnosed mental health injury and go through disability adjudication, "over 90 per cent of all those claims are approved."[81] However, the challenge lies in getting these individuals to contact VAC in the first place, because "only then are we able to get them into treatment."[82]

b. *Suicide prevention strategy in cooperation with the CAF*

On 5 October 2017, Veterans Affairs Canada and the Canadian Armed Forces released a Joint Suicide Prevention Strategy which comprises over 160 actions underway or in development grouped into seven lines of effort, which are: Communicating, Engaging & Educating; Building & Supporting Resilient CAF Members & Veterans; Connecting & Strengthening CAF Members & Veterans through Families and Community; Providing Timely Access to Effective Health Care & Support; Promoting Well-being of CAF Members through their Transition to Civilian Life; Protocols, Policies, and Processes to Better Manage Risk & Stress; and Continuously Improve Through Research, Analysis and Incorporation of Lessons Learned and Best Practices.[83]

During his appearance in March 2018, the current Minister of Veterans Affairs commented on the new suicide prevention strategy:

> This new strategy builds on many existing services and programs, including our nationwide network of 4,000 mental health professionals. However, it is important that we continue to learn, innovate and share best practices, which is why we are also establishing a Centre of Excellence on PTSD and related mental health conditions. Expected to launch soon, the Centre of Excellence will provide information and research results to frontline health professionals to help ensure Canada's military, whether they are still in uniform or already released, receive more comprehensive and consistent care.[84]

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[80] VEAC, *Evidence*, 10 May 2017, (Hehr).
[81] VEAC, *Evidence*, 10 May 2017 (Natynczyk).
[82] Ibid.
[83] Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Canada, *Joint Suicide Prevention Strategy*, 2017.
[84] VEAC, *Evidence*, 21 March 2018 (O'Regan).

2. Subcommittee observations and recommendation

The National Defence and CAF Ombudsman identified that the government's pay scale for providers of mental health services is a deterrent in meeting the needs of transitioning veterans:

> One of the issues we are coming against when we look for mental health workers is the wage rates offered by the Government of Canada versus what is available at the provincial or the private sector level, which puts us at a disadvantage.[85]

Mr. Blais, of CVA, described the compensation as approximately 30% less "than any other government entity in Canada [pays for such services]."[86] As the National Defence and CAF Ombudsman said, the compensation level has to "become competitive if we want to hire the right resources."[87]

The Subcommittee was particularly struck by the issues brought to its attention concerning compensation levels for providers of mental health services to veterans, and therefore recommends:

Recommendation 10

> **That the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Canada immediately determine and establish competitive compensation rates for mental health professionals to support CAF members and veterans.**

F. Determining a new purpose in life and the supports to achieve it

In their discussion of the need to professionalize the CAF release processes, the Veterans Ombudsman, the National Defence and CAF Ombudsman and the Chief of the Defence Staff described the need for all releasing members to work with CAF and/or VAC to determine a goal for themselves following release from the CAF.

The National Defence and CAF Ombudsman described the failure of the current processes to determine "the desired outcome" of the transition process. Only once this is established, he emphasized, can appropriate transition services and supports be identified and implemented.[88]

In his testimony, the Veterans Ombudsman described recent qualitative research undertaken by his office "to better understand what contributes to a successful transition, based on the lived experience of medically released veterans who self-identified as having a successful transition."[89] He continued,

> When asked about the role that finding purpose outside of the military played in their transition, participants stated that it represented a significant challenge because they had spent most of their lives in the military. This is an important finding

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[85] VEAC, *Evidence*, 8 March 2017 (Walbourne).
[86] VEAC, *Evidence*, 3 May 2017, (Blais).
[87] VEAC, *Evidence*, 8 March 2017 (Walbourne).
[88] VEAC, *Evidence*, 8 March 2017 (Walbourne).
[89] VEAC, *Evidence*, 29 March 2017, (Parent).

> because it highlights the significance of integrating the shaping of self-worth and identifying a new life purpose post military service into the transition process.[90]

The Chief of the Defence Staff described the importance of purpose to a successful transition, particularly for those who are being released involuntarily:

> One of the greatest complaints or concerns by people who suffer potentially mentally, physically or otherwise is that this life in uniform is full of purpose. Every single day you are completely and utterly involved in the defence of Canada. You *are*, by definition, full of purpose. A sudden separation … without adequate preparation, leaves you absent that purpose that has been the driving force in your life for so long.[91]

In his appearance before the Subcommittee, the then-Minister of Veterans Affairs listed some important factors in the well-being of veterans: "Their well-being consists of having purpose, financial security, shelter, support, family and community support and a sense of identity, and we are committed to helping them achieve that."[92]

The VAC Deputy Minister identified the failure to find a new purpose as a major factor in the less successful transitions. He identified the majority of those as "more junior ranks," who have not served long enough to be entitled to a retirement pension, and those whose "skills are not readily transferrable to civil society."[93]

1. Current initiatives and planned or proposed changes

In spring 2017, the then-Minister of Veterans Affairs told the Subcommittee that "supporting education and professional development will ensure more released military members can find a new sense of purpose to put their skills to use."[94]

In that respect, he referred to the department's forthcoming roll out of the Education and Training Benefit. It has been available since 1 April 2018. It provides veterans with six years of service up to $40,000 for college, university or technical training, and those with over 12 years of service up to $80,000.[95]

The former VAC Minister also indicated that the Department was "redesigning the Career Transition Services … so that more people can make use of them, including survivors, spouses and partners and those members of the Canadian Armed Forces who might not want to go back to school."[96] He added that there will be "access to job

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[90] Ibid.
[91] VEAC, *Evidence*, 12 April 2017, (Vance).
[92] VEAC, *Evidence*, 10 May 2017, (Hehr).
[93] VEAC, *Evidence*, 10 May 2017 (Natynczyk).
[94] VEAC, *Evidence*, 10 May 2017 (Hehr).
[95] VEAC, *Evidence*, 21 March 2018 (O'Regan).
[96] VEAC, *Evidence*, 10 May 2017 (Hehr).

search assistance and counselling to work with the veteran and the employers to ensure success, from coaches who understand military culture."[97]

As of 1 April 2018, medically released veterans and their families can access 32 Military Family Resource Centres (MFRCs) across the country, which were formerly only for serving members. [98] MFRC's services include "welcome and community orientation sessions, parenting workshops, child care, outreach, information and referral, personal growth and development programming, as well as employment and educational assistance."[99]

In the fall of 2017, the new Veterans Affairs Minister announced the creation of the Veterans in the Public Service Unit (VPSU) within his Department. The VPSU will inform veterans of their hiring entitlements to the work opportunities available in the public service, and how to apply for these jobs, including how to describe "their skills, military education and experience in terms that public service hiring managers will understand." It will also assist veterans with their applications and work "with managers from across the public service, in promoting the training, experiences and skill-sets of Canadian Veterans."[100]

The Chief of the Defence staff presented to the Subcommittee "The Journey", the Canadian Forces initiative underway whose goal is to develop a modern personnel management system with a more personalized approach, and highlighted its three core aspects:

> First, developing a flexible, adaptive career path; second, professionalizing our transition process; and third, as part of the plan to converge the Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs efforts around veteran administration, we will help and do our part to set the conditions for the success of our members once they leave uniformed service.[101]

General Vance echoed the Veterans Ombudsman's statements on the importance of creating a transition system as professional as the recruitment system, and consistent across the country. He added that it is crucial for all releasing members to understand that their "new mission" is to transition successfully and to find a new purpose in life.

He stated that "finding employment, transitioning into new employment, finding a path that is right for you for education, or vocational rehab, or whatever support you need so that you can go on and find new purpose, is what this professionalization of our transition services and closing the seams with VAC are all about."[102]

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[97] Ibid.
[98] VEAC, *Evidence*, 21 March 2018 (O'Regan).
[99] Veterans Affairs Canada, "Budget 2017 - Fact Sheet - Expansion of the Veteran Family Program across all Military Family Resource Centres", 11 May 2017.
[100] Veterans Affairs Canada, "Minister O'Regan announces an initiative to support Veteran hiring in the Public Service and issues a corporate challenge", 28 September 2017.
[101] VEAC, *Evidence*, 12 April 2017, (Vance).
[102] Ibid.

2. Subcommittee observations and recommendation

The Veterans Ombudsman stated that a professional transition system which mirrors the CAF recruitment system should include professional counsellors who "would help determine the education, training or employment needs of the member, as well as assist them in finding their new purpose in life, tailored to their attributes and desires"[103].

After hearing how central finding and attaining a new objective in life is for veterans to experience a positive transition to civilian life, the Subcommittee wants to ensure that releasing CAF members and veterans have the professional support required and recommends:

Recommendation 11

That the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Canada collaborate to ensure that all releasing members and veterans can access career counselling in order to determine a new objective in life and the means to achieve it.

G. Improving collaboration with other levels of government and agencies

1. Current initiatives and planned or proposed changes

The Veterans Affairs Deputy Minister and the Veterans Ombudsman both shared their thoughts with the Subcommittee about VAC collaborating with provincial, territorial and local governments with respect to providing veterans with certain services.

On the topic of health care services, the VAC Deputy Minister explained as follows:

> [T]he federal government, including Veterans Affairs, does not provide health care services to veterans. The first payor is always the provinces and territories. But if a veteran has an injury, or disability, or illness as a result of service, and the province does not pay for it and the veteran would be out of pocket, then ... we have reimbursed veterans.[104]

He also highlighted the following with regard to mental health services:

> Veterans Affairs, since 2002, has partnered with all of the provinces to enable a higher level of access to mental health practitioners across the country. Again, it's not Veterans Affairs providing the support, it's the provinces on a reimbursement

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[103] VEAC, *Evidence*, 29 March 2017, (Parent).

[104] VEAC, *Evidence*, 10 May 2017 (Natynczyk).

> basis. We are providing support not only to the 11 operational stress injury clinics but also to about 4,000 mental health care professionals from coast to coast.[105]

The Veterans Ombudsman stated that his office had tried to "bring levels of government together to look after the care and wellness of our veterans and their families ... for housing, for instance [and] to get the municipalities, the provincial governments and federal government to work together so that there is a transparent continuum of service ... that brings a very high level of wellness to veterans and their families."[106].

The VAC Deputy Minister also discussed current efforts with respect to collaborating with police services regarding their dealings with veterans:

> We've actually created a video with the policing professional development academy. We have created part of a training package for police forces across the country on how to deal with veterans, homeless veterans and veterans in crisis. ... It is out there now to educate police forces across the country to deal with veterans who are in crisis, those they find homeless on the streets and those with mental health injuries. It helps inform them of the resources that are there in order to get them in contact with Veterans Affairs to get them on a better path.[107]

2. Subcommittee observations and recommendations

In light of the evidence received, the Subcommittee finds that such collaborations could benefit from greater formality in order to give veterans priority in seeking government services, and to make important connections that would allow for more effective services to veterans. Subcommittee members and witnesses both agree that it would be beneficial for VAC to increase collaboration with the provincial and territorial governments in order to provide veterans with services, given that the delivery of health, education and social services is under their jurisdiction. In order to enhance collaboration, the Subcommittee recommends:

Recommendation 12

> **That the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada seek more formal arrangements, through contracts or memoranda of understanding, to give veterans priority in accessing health, education and social services provided by provincial and territorial governments.**

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[105] Ibid.
[106] VEAC, *Evidence*, 29 March 2017, (Parent).
[107] VEAC, *Evidence*, 10 May 2017 (Natynczyk).

Recommendation 13

That the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Canada develop linkages with local police services to support police in their encounters with veterans and serving members, and to ensure that veterans and serving members who interact with police are referred to appropriate VAC services.

MOVING FORWARD

The Subcommittee heard from witnesses that the transition from soldier to civilian is an individual one, necessitating varying levels of guidance, support, and services. Testimony provided ample evidence of improvements to date and a window on aspirations for a seamless transition and steps being taken to make them a reality. The passionate commitment of senior officials, ombudsmen and veterans' organizations representatives to current and former members of the CAF was itself evident, and appreciated.

As the Departments of National Defence and Veterans Affairs move forward, the Subcommittee believes the recommendations contained in this report will contribute to professionalizing the transition from military to civilian life.

It is the sincere hope of the Subcommittee that as a result, in the near future, no CAF member will be released without their benefits and pension in place. That the transition process will be simpler to go through, in particular with the help of navigators available to the releasing members. That veterans will be able to go to VAC, at any point in time, and easily access the benefits and services they are entitled to, because all the necessary information will be available. That every possible effort will be made to work with releasing members to help them identify a new purpose in life and the ways to achieve it. And that in order to achieve all of the above, DND and VAC will ensure the necessary staff is in place to support our releasing members and our veterans, whether it be case-managers, career counsellors, or mental health specialists. The Subcommittee members believe that the men and women who made unfathomable sacrifices to defend our country deserve to see these improvements implemented without delay.

APPENDIX A – LIST OF WITNESSES

Wednesday March 8, 2017	
National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman	Gary Walbourne, Ombudsman
Wednesday March 29, 2017	
Veterans Ombudsman	Guy Parent, Veterans Ombudsman
	Sharon Squire, Deputy Veterans Ombudsman and Executive Director
Wednesday April 12, 2017	
National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces	General Jonathan Vance, Chief of the Defence Staff
Wednesday May 3, 2017	
Canadian Veterans Advocacy	Michael L. Blais, President and Founder
	Sylvain Chartrand, Director
Canadian Aboriginal Veterans	Richard Blackwolf, National President
Royal Canadian Legion	Ray McInnis, Director, Service Bureau
Wednesday May 10, 2017	
Veterans Affairs Canada	The Honourable Kent Hehr, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence
	General (Ret'd) W. J. Natynczyk, Deputy Minister
Wednesday Mach 21, 2018	
Veterans Affairs Canada	The Honourable Seamus O'Regan, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence
	General (Ret'd) W. J. Natynczyk, Deputy Minister